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Ruch, Willibald ; Zuckerman, M

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Willibald Ruch, Marvin Zuckerman

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1. Introduction

All situational factors being equal, individuals still differ in their risk-taking behavior. Some are more inclined to engage in risks, others less so. Some engage in risks quite thoughtlessly no matter what the consequences might be, while others accept the risk but attempt to minimize it while indulging in rewarding but risky activities. Personality traits must be defined to describe, predict, and eventually explain such internal causes for inter-individual differences in propensity for taking risks and the style thereof .

The present chapter focuses on the biosocial trait of sensation seeking as a predictor of risk-taking behavior. There are good reasons for this as the sensation-seeking motive can illuminate why some people take risks and others do not, and several studies have shown the validity of the concept in this field. Furthermore, cross-sectional studies with the sensation-seeking scale show that sensation seeking peeks in late adolescence, the time span of interest here.

The concept of sensation seeking originated in work on explaining individual differences in sensory deprivation but rapidly expanded in validity to account for more diverse behaviors. The behavioral expressions of sensation seeking have not only been found in various kinds of risk-taking behaviors such as driving habits, gambling, health, financial activities, alcohol and drug use, sexual behavior, and sports, but the trait was found to be also involved in vocational preferences and choices, job satisfaction, social premarital and marital relationships, eating habits and food preferences, creativity, humor, fantasy, media and art preferences, and social attitudes.

There have been almost 40 years of research on this trait. Marvin Zuckerman authored two major book publications that summarize the advances made in research and theory. The first one, "Sensation Seeking: Beyond the Optimal Level of Arousal," was published in 1979 and was followed by "Behavioral Expressions and Biosocial Basis of Sensation Seeking" in 1994. For more details in the assessment, behavioral expressions, genetic and psychobiological bases, and the biosocial model for the trait the reader is referred to these books. Journal articles are numerous as well. Between the publication of the first sensations seeking scale (SSS) in 1964 and 1978 were 246 citations in the psychological literature under the term *sensation seeking*. Between the 1979 book and 1990 were over 400 additional publications, and there have been approximately 770 between 1991 and 2000, demonstrating the continuous interest in this trait.

2. Definition of sensation seeking

The definitions of complex traits like sensation seeking cannot be summarized in one sentence without a certain loss of information. Also, decades of intense research make it likely that the definition of a trait changes somewhat to adequately account for the obtained findings. A definition of sensation seeking was first derived from the types of items constituting the early forms of the sensation seeking scale (SSS); in Zuckerman's first book, the definition given was, "Sensation seeking is a trait defined by the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience" (Zuckerman, 1979, p.10).

Subsequent research relating scores on the SSS to behavior, reported behavior, expectations, anticipations, and risk appraisals suggested several modifications which are discussed in detail in the second book (Zuckerman, 1994). For example, *seeking* and *preference* were found more appropriate terms instead of the less behavioral term *need* which does imply compulsion, which does not characterize the activity of sensation seekers. Likewise, it seemed appropriate to add an intensity as a further stimulus dimension in addition to those of vanity, novelty, and complexity, intensity being particularly related to one subfactor of sensation seeking, namely the component of disinhibition (Zuckerman, 1984). While risk-taking behavior is a correlate of sensation seeking and not an essential part of the definition, it is important to

note that two types of risks, legal and financial, were added to the definition. Thus, the most current definition of sensation seeking is the following:

> "Sensation seeking is a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience". (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 26)

The two types of risk were added because of results from prior factor analyses of risk appraisal categories (Horvath & Zuckerman, 1993). As Zuckerman (1994) points out, many situations involve several types of risk, and these need to be adequately accounted for. For example, if people drive very fast after heavy drinking and become involved in accidents, they may kill or injure themselves (physical risk); they may be arrested and jailed (legal risk); they may be fined or lose their jobs (financial risk); or they may be exposed in the newspapers and condemned by others as drunken drivers (social risk). However, as will be pointed out below, the sensation seeker does not seek to maximize risk for its own sake but rather underestimates or accepts risk as the price for the reward provided by the sensation or experience itself.

3. Measurement of sensation seeking

Work on the first sensation-seeking scale began in the early 1960s based on the idea that there were consistent individual differences in optimal levels of stimulation and arousal and that these differences could be measured with a questionnaire. The initial experimental form (I) was developed from preliminary ideas about the likely expressions of a need for varied and intense stimulation and arousal in human activities and attitudes. The items were written in a forced-choice form in an attempt to minimize the factor of social desirability. Items defining the general factor in both male and female samples were used to make the General scale (form II; Zuckerman et al. 1964). Later factor analyses suggested a need to distinguish among them for components, but the steady finding of a strong first factor and the discovery of correlations among subfactors suggested the need to continue using a total score of sensation seeking.

Nevertheless, since 1971 four subscales have been used. This decision was based on factor analyses of different item sets, which, in men and women separately, yielded four factors, three of which were very similar across gender. The fourth factor, boredom susceptibility, was not as similar in men and women but was retained in form IV and the later form V. The four factors were described in terms of the types of items defining them.

Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) represents the desire to engage in sports or other physically risky activities that provide unusual sensations of speed or defiance of gravity, such as scuba diving, parachuting, or skiing. Most of the items are expressed as intention ("I would like . . .") rather than reports of experience as to accommodate the fact that most of the activities are not common. An attitude item that summarizes the factor is "I sometimes like to do things that are a little frightening."

Experience Seeking (ES) involves seeking of novel sensations and experiences through the mind and senses, as in arousing music, even psychedelic drugs, art, and travel, and through social nonconformity, as in association with groups on the fringe of conventional society (e.g., artists, hippies, homosexuals).

Disinhibition (DIS) describes the seeking sensation through drinking, partying, gambling, and sexual variety. Items of this scale indicate seeking of stimulation through other persons; they express a need for variety in social life and other hedonistic pursuits. An attitude item describing the factor is "I like to have new and exciting experiences even if they are a little unconventional or illegal."

Boredom Susceptibility (BS) items indicate an intolerance for repetitive experience of any kind, including routine work and boring people. High scorers a have a high aversion to boredom produced by the absence of stimulation and restlessness as a reaction to boredom. An item expressing the attitude is "The worst social sin is to be a bore" (versus the forced-choice alternative "The worst social sin is to be rude.").

Form IV subscale internal reliabilities were good for the TAS, ES, and
DIS scales (ranging from .68 to .84), but lower for the BS scale, particularly for women. Retest reliabilities were high for the General scale (.89 for periods up to 3 weeks and .75 for 6 to 8 months) and good for the subscales. Form V brought certain improvements; the number of items was reduced from 72 to 40, allowing for a more balanced total score. Also, the intercorrelation among the subscales was reduced, colloquial terms were eliminated, and the item selection took cross-gender and cross-cultural criteria into

account. The reliability of form V (still the most widely used form) was maintained despite the lower number of items.

Further forms have been developed differing in response format, scale coverage, and populations addressed. These developments and their implications for the domain of content covered by the sensation-seeking construct are presented in Zuckerman (1994). Among them is form VI, which uses only the TAS and ES scales and divides each type of scale into two sets: experienced activities (E) and intended or desired activities (I). The response format is a three-point Likert-type weighted response scale. The scale is highly reliable, and it is intended to assess sensation seeking in persons where current levels may have changed from past levels due to age, depression, or other factors. The SSS has been translated into 15 languages, and when most of the original items were retained or only slightly altered, generally factors similar to those in the English SSS were found.

A measure of sensation seeking is also incorporated in the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (ZKPQ). Starting from factor analyses of items from different temperament inventories, Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, Teta, and Kraft (1993) arrived at an "alternative five factor model" of personality. A five-factor solution seemed optimal and interestingly one of these factors was entirely composed of impulsiveness and sensation-seeking items and was hence called impulsive sensation seeking (ImpSS). The ImpSS items of Form III of the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire in the authorized German translation are given in the Appendix.

One noted advantage of this scale is that its items are of a general type and do not specify particular activities or preferences that might be bound to culture and context. Of the 11 sensation-seeking items, 8 came from SSS V, 4 stem from the ES, 2 from the DIS, and one each from the TAS and BS subscales. The internal reliability of the ImpSS scale is around .80, and it correlates highly enough with the total SS score ($r = .66$) and about equally high with all the SS subscales (in the rage of .37 to .45). This scale is particularly useful when information on other traits of the model—sociability, activity, anxiety-neuroticism, and aggression-hostility—should be assessed as well.

4. Socio-demographic differences in sensation seeking

Publications using the SSS often reported results on socio-demographic differences in sensation seeking either as a side-result or as the major focus of the study. Therefore, findings on demographic data on college and non-college samples in the USA and elsewhere have accumulated been reviewed (Zuckerman, 1979, 1984).

Some national differences were encountered on the SSS. For example, students in Asiatic countries scored lower than students in Western countries on the General SSS (Zuckerman, 1979). Other analyses showed young Australians, Americans, and Canadians to be high on sensation seeking relative to Spanish students. While there was no difference in the Total score (form V) among American, English, and Scottish students for males, Scottish females scored significantly higher than American women, which were higher, in turn, than English women. Other differences were reported, but such comparisons are sometimes impaired as researchers changed the scale when adapting it to a particular country.

"Racial" comparisons in college and among drug abusers and delinquents generally show blacks scoring lower than whites on the SSS General and TAS scales, but differences are less commonly found on the DIS scale (which is a more universal form of sensation seeking than is TAS, which represents activities and sport simply less commonly found in areas where blacks live). Socioeconomic status, as assessed by education and occupation of parents, seems to have more influence on sensation seeking among women than among men (Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980). High sensation seekers are more likely to divorce, and divorced men rank higher on sensation seeking than the younger singles as well as married men. Among females, married women score lower on sensation seeking than both single and divorced women. High sensation seekers are more prone to atheism or agnosticism than the practice of any of the conventional religions studied (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish), and those who do have a nominal identification with a church do not tend to go to church very much (Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980).

The strongest differences regarding demographic factors were found for age and sex. Zuckerman (1994) summarizes that sensation seeking is higher in men than in women, rises between ages 9 and 14, peaks in late adolescence or early 20s, and declines steadily with age thereafter. These age differences were already predicted in early theoretical statements on sensation seeking. Figure 1 shows the age differences

in the sensation-seeking scale as found in an Australian sample (Ball, Farnhill, & Wangeman, 1984). Longitudinal studies (albeit of a shorter time span) suggest that changes seen in cross-sectional studies are real age changes rather than generational differences although the latter may affect some of the SS scales, as presumably is the case with the results found for ES in the study by Ball et al. (1984).

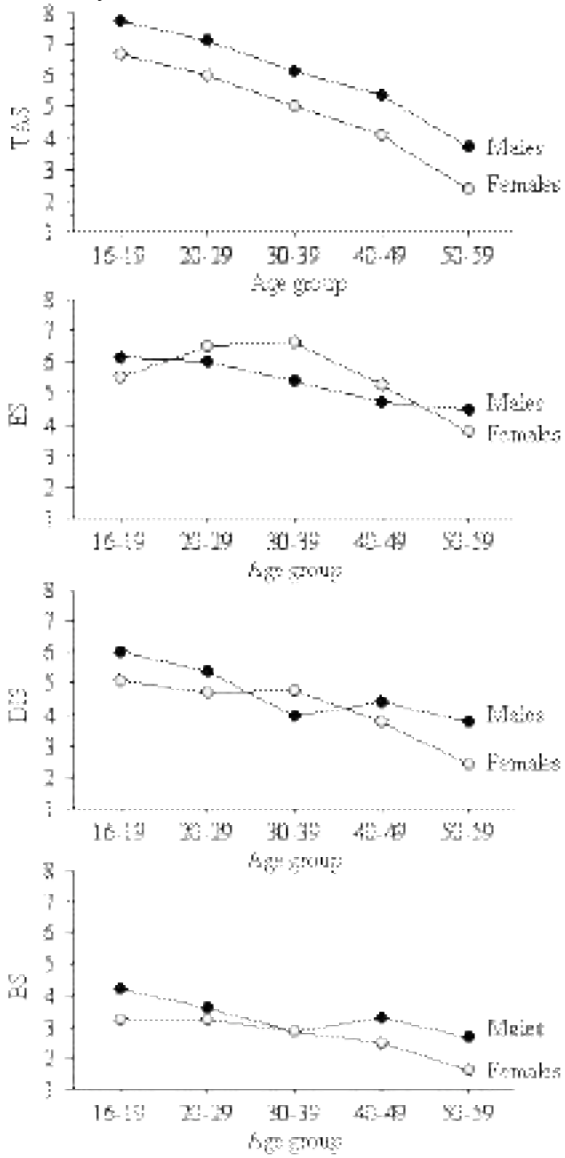

Figure 1. Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) Total score (form V) as a function of age in Australian men and women. Constructed from data in From "Sex and age differences in sensation seeking: Some national comparisons, " by I.L.Ball, D. Farnhill, J.F Wangeman, 1984, *British Journal of Psychology, 75*, 257-265.

5. Risk-taking and sensation seeking

Risk taking for the sake of novel experience has been part of the definition of sensation seeking since the beginning of research on this trait. Initially the major emphasis was on physical risk taking, as manifest in the Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) subscale, but subsequent research has shown that other kinds of risk were involved in the broader trait, including social, legal, and financial ones (Horvath & Zucker-

man, 1993). This led to a broader theory of risk taking in terms of conflict between positive and negative affects or outcome expectancies as outlined in Zuckerman (1994).

However, as mentioned earlier, risk-taking behavior is a correlate of sensation seeking but not an essential part of the definition. Some forms of sensations and experiences do not entail risks at all. When risk is involved, high sensation seekers are inclined to accept it for the reward provided by the sensation-seeking activities. They underestimate the risks involved or attempt to minimize it but do not seek to maximize risk for its own sake. Risk taking is not the essential goal of sensensation seeking. The low sensation seekers are not just avoiding risk; they see no reward in the sensation or experience itself that could justify what they perceive as the high levels of risk involved.

Nevertheless, sensation seeking has been powerful in predicting individual differences in engaging in a variety of risks. Zuckerman (1976) presented a model delineating the interaction between sensation seeking and anxiety states and cognitive appraisal of risk in determining approach or withdrawal from a risky situation. In short, according to this model novelty elicits positive interest and sensation-seeking affect up to some maximal degree of novelty after which the effect of further novelty is unpredictable, depending on the degree of threat in the situation. While anxiety state varies directly with the appraised threat or risk, sensation-seeking state first increases with appraised risk, but beyond some optimal level of arousal it is diminished by further increases in risk. The latter two functions are different though for high and low sensation seekers. High sensation seekers have lower anxiety gradients and higher sensation-seeking affect gradients in response to increasing degrees of novelty and appraised risk. This allows for the prediction of different behavior and affect of highs and lows in relation to risk. High sensation seeker should have a less steep avoidance gradient, and the peak in sensation-seeking arousal should come later than in the low sensation seeker.

A large body of research was conducted to test this and related hypotheses, and the findings were reviewed in detail in Zuckerman (1994); many of these studies were conducted with adolescents. The conclusions drawn there are in sync with the findings of later research (e.g., Greene et al., 2000; Langewisch & Frisch, 1998; Shapiro et al, 1998; Stacy & Newcomb, 1999; Wood et al, 1995), and when more trait variables were used in the prediction, sensation seeking commonly turned out to be among the most powerful ones (Arnett, 1996; Hampson et al., 2001).

Sensation-seeking drivers drive faster than low sensation seekers (Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980). They are more likely to drive while intoxicated and have frequent accidents than low sensation seekers. Although male sensation seekers tend to drive at high speeds, they do not neglect fastening their seat belts any more than low sensation seekers do. Similarly, although high sensation seekers are more likely to be sexually active than low sensation seekers, they are not less likely to use contraception and condom protection against infection. More recently, Kraft and Rise (1994) found a Norwegian 18-item version of the Sensation Seeking Scale to be associated with coital experience, number of sex partners, and experience of casual sex studied in male and female adolescents (991 girls and 850 boys). Again, sensation seeking was not associated with contraception use.

However, other variables, like hostile aggressiveness in combination with sensation seeking best predict reckless behavior, like reckless driving. Using two samples of high school and college students, Arnett (1996) found both sensation seeking and aggressiveness be involved in predicting reckless behavior among adolescents. While sensation seeking best provided a common basis for four types of reckless behavior (automobile driving, sexual behavior, drug use, and minor criminal acts), aggressiveness also yielded some support.

Gambling is a form of sensation seeking in which the major reinforcement for gamblers is the anticipatory arousal during the betting. One study showed correlations among sensation seeking, bet size, and heart rate increases in gamblers while gambling in a real casino setting (see Zuckerman, 1994). Sensation seeking was also shown to be involved in gambling among adolescents (Langewisch & Frisch, 1998). However, it was unrelated to the phenomenon of „chasing“ (Breen & Zuckerman, 1999), one of the central characteristics of the behavior of pathological gamblers referring to more frequent involvement, increased persistence, and elevated monetary risk in an effort to recoup money that has been lost. However, in this laboratory study with male college students, the impulsivity factor (from the ZKPQ) discriminated chasers from nonchasers.

Sensation seekers like to travel and are more willing to accept uncertainty and risk in travel to less familiar kinds of places (like Asia, the Antarctica, or the moon). They anticipate more pleasurable arousal

and less anxiety in travel to high-risk places than low sensation seekers, but there is no difference for low-risk destinations.

Sports and exercise vary in degree of perceived risk, and thus one can expect that sensation seeking is also useful to explain the preference for types of sports (Zuckerman, 1983). In fact, high-risk and medium-risk sports attract more high than low sensation seekers, and some low-risk sports, such as long-distance running, are more attractive to low sensation seekers. Sensation seeking is not related to low-risk sports that require intense effort and constant training and practice. Participation in risky sports is most often predicted by the General, Total and ES scales but rarely on the DIS scale, suggesting that those engaging in risky sports are interested in a broad range of thrill-seeking outdoor activities that provide novel and stimulating experiences, but they are not necessarily social sensation seekers nor susceptible to boredom. Again, also in sports the risk is not a goal in itself but minimized by adequate precautions (Zuckerman, 1994).

Taken together, these findings suggest that sensation seeking is a powerful predictor for engaging in all kinds of risks. High sensation seekers tend to appraise many situations as less risky than low sensation seekers. The lower risk appraisal of high sensation seekers seems to be a function of their behavioral experience, not a cognitive trait or disposition to underestimate risk. A strong link between sensation seeking and certain kinds of risky behavior was found for all age groups, but this finding pertains in particular to adolescents as many of the studies were conducted with participants of this age span.

6. Biosocial bases of sensation seeking

Much research was devoted to the biological underpinnings of sensation seeking with contributions coming from disciplines like behavior genetics, neuropsychology, biological psychiatry, and psychophysiology (Zuckerman, Buchsbaum, & Murphy, 1980; Zuckerman, 1993). Only some findings will be mentioned here; for extensive reviews, see Zuckerman (1993, 1994).

Studies of twins raised together or separately in adopted families show a high degree of heritability (about 60% genetic) for the trait, with no evidence of an influence of shared environment on the trait. As the range of heritability calculated for most broader personality traits is 40%-60%, with the typical heritability around 50% (Zuckerman, 1991), this figure for general sensation seeking is at the high end of the range for personality traits. Judging from the high level of assortative mating and reports of peer behavior, there is a considerable gene-environment correlation: i.e., high sensation seekers select friends and peer groups who reinforce their own natural predilections, and low sensation seekers seek out quieter and more reliable friends (Zuckerman, 2000).

High sensation seekers have high levels of testosterone, and low sensation seekers have average levels of this hormone, and this could in part explain the typical finding of males scoring higher in SS than females (except ES). High sensation seekers have lower levels of monoamine oxidase type B (MAOB)--an enzyme with a strong genetic determination, which regulates monoamine neurotransmitters, particularly dopamine, in the brain. Low levels of MAO are also related to various behavioral expressions of sensation seekers, such as failed inhibitions in a motor task, risky behavior in an investment game, mountain climbing, alcohol and drug use and abuse, and criminality.

Anther monoamine, norepinephrine, is related to arousability and plays a role in alarm and panic. Ballenger et al. (1983) found a metabolite of norepinephrine (obtained from cerebrospinal fluid) to be negatively correlated with sensation seeking, suggesting that arousal in this system is weaker in high sensation seekers, thereby providing another explanation for their fearlessness in risky situations.

7. Conclusion

Adolescent risk taking may be better understood by taking the biosocial trait of sensation seeking or related variables into account. There is a large body of findings relating both the SS and the ImpSS scales to various forms of risk-taking, and these findings are in agreement with the model put forward. Another parallel can be seen in the fact that the reported demographic data on sensation seeking are consistent with known sex and age risk factors pertaining to driving accidents, criminal violations, and other phenomena in which young males are usually at highest risk (see other chapters of this book); sensation seeking peaks at the time when risk behavior is most prevalent.

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Items der Skala ImpSS bzw. der konstituierenden Komponenten Sensation-Seeking (SS) und Impulsivity (Imp) im ZKPQ-III nebst Anleitung und Auswertungsschlüssel.

ZKPQ-III (1. revidierte Fassung)

Anweisung: Auf den folgenden Seiten finden Sie eine Reihe von Aussagen, die Personen verwenden könnten, um sich selbst zu beschreiben. Bitte lesen Sie jede Aussage und entscheiden Sie, ob diese auf Sie zutrifft oder nicht. Kreuzen Sie dann Ihre Antwort in den Kästchen rechts neben den Fragen an.

Wenn Sie mit einer Aussage übereinstimmen oder denken, dass sie Sie beschreibt, dann kreuzen Sie das A (= Richtig) an. Wenn Sie mit einer Aussage nicht übereinstimmen oder finden, dass die Beschreibung nicht zu Ihnen passt, kreuzen Sie bitte das B (= Falsch) an.

Beantworten Sie bitte jede Aussage mit „Richtig“ oder „Falsch“, auch wenn Sie nicht hundertprozentig sicher sind.

		A	B
1.	Meistens fange ich mit einer neuen Arbeit an, ohne lange vorher darüber nachzudenken, wie ich sie erledigen werde.	o	o
6.	Normalerweise denke ich darüber nach, was ich tun werde, bevor ich es in Angriff nehme.	o	o
14.	Ich handle oft impulsiv.	o	o
19.	Nur selten verbringe ich Zeit damit, Details vorauszuplanen.	o	o
24.	Ich erlebe gerne neue und aufregende Erfahrungen und Empfindungen, sogar wenn sie mich ein wenig ängstigen.	o	o
29.	Bevor ich mit einer schwierigen Aufgabe beginne, plane ich sorgfältig.	o	o
34.	Ich würde gern spontan verreisen, ohne die Reiseroute oder den Fahrplan genau festzulegen.	o	o
39.	Ich gerate gerne in neue Situationen, in denen nicht abzusehen ist, wie sie ausgehen.	o	o
45.	Ich tue viele Dinge nur wegen des Nervenkitzels.	o	o
50.	Ich neige dazu, meine Interessen häufig zu wechseln.	o	o
55.	Manchmal tue ich gern Dinge, die mir ein bisschen Angst machen.	o	o
60.	Ich werde alles einmal ausprobieren.	o	o
65.	Ich wünsche mir ein Leben, das es mir erlaubt, viel unterwegs und auf Reisen zu sein, um viele Veränderungen und Aufregungen zu erleben.	o	o
70.	Manchmal mache ich „verrückte“ Sachen nur so zum Spaß.	o	o
75.	Ich erkunde gerne eine fremde Stadt oder ein Stadtviertel auf eigene Faust, auch wenn ich dabei Gefahr laufe, mich zu verirren.	o	o
79.	Ich bevorzuge Freunde, die auf aufregende Weise unberechenbar sind.	o	o
84.	Ich werde oft von neuen, aufregenden Sachen und Ideen so gebannt, dass ich an mögliche Komplikationen gar nicht denke.	o	o
89.	Ich bin ein impulsiver Mensch.	o	o
95.	Ich mag „wilde“, hemmungslose Parties.	o	o

Auswertungschlüssel für die Skala ImpSS des Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire Form III (ZKPQ III):
Für für jedes Item, das wie angegeben mit „Richtig“ (R) bzw. „Falsch“ (F) beantwortet wurde wird ein Punkt vergeben (sonst kein Punkt). Die Punkte für die Subskalen Imp und SS werden getrennt aufsummiert. Der Punktwert in der Skala ImpSS ergibt sich aus der Summe von Imp und SS.
Skala Impulsive Sensation Seeking (ImpSS): 19 Items
Imp-Items: 1R, 6F, 14R, 19R, 29F, 39R, 84R, 89R
SS-Items: 24R, 34R, 45R, 50R, 55R, 60R, 65R, 70R, 75R, 79R, 95R